

Message Text

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15

ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 IO-14 ISO-00 SAB-01 SAM-01 CU-04 OPR-02 SY-10

CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-11 INR-10 LAB-06 NSAE-00 RSC-01

SIL-01 TRSE-00 OMB-01 SCCT-02 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 L-03

NSC-07 PA-04 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20 USIA-15 DRC-01 /141 W

----- 119256

R 151439Z MAR 74KXXKC

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6937

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

USINT DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USMISSION GENEVA

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 3056

GENEVA FOR MEPC DEL

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS PINT LE

SUBJ: LEBANESE INTERNAL SITUATION

SUMMARY: PAST WEEK HAS BEEN MARKED BY STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS, MANEUVERING OF POLITICAL OPPOSITION, SOME POSITIVE ACTION BY LEBANESE CABINET AND SEVERAL INCIDENTS INVOLVING LOCAL SECURITY FORCES AND FEDAYEEN OR OTHER LEFTIST GROUPS. WHILE SITUATION COULD DEGENERATE, IT APPEARS THAT STUDENTS WILL NOT BE JOINED BY WORKERS. SECURITY INCIDENTS MORE IN NATURE OF ISOLATED EVENTS THAN FORERUNNERS OF MORE WIDESPREAD CONFRONTATION BETWEEN GOL AND FEDAYEEN, ALTHOUGH IRAQIS AND OTHERS AGITATING LOCAL SCENE IN EFFORT DEMONSTRATE OPPOSITION TO POSITIVE TRENDS IN MIDDLE EAST. END SUMMARY.

1. DURING PAST WEEK, STUDENTS OF ALL OF LEBANON'S UNIVERSITIES

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HAVE BEEN ON STRIKE, APPARENTLY MOTIVATED IN PART BY LONG-

STANDING STUDENT GRIEVANCES RE GOL ACTION (OR INACTION) IN EDUCATION FIELD, PARTLY BY LEFTIST AGITATORS (INCLUDING PRO-IRAQI WING OF BAATH AND OTHER LEFTISTS) PARTLY BY FEELING OF GENERAL POLITICAL MALAISE, AND PARTLY BY STUDENT SPRING-FEVER. FOLLOWING ACTION BY LEBANESE CABINET MAR 14 TO PROCEED WITH CONSTRUCTION ADDITIONAL FACILITIES AT LEBANESE UNIVERSITY AND EXTEND SOCIAL SECURITY COVERAGE TO STUDENTS, DEMONSTRATORS SPLIT--WITH MORE MODERATE LEADERS FROM LEBANESE UNIVERSITY AND ST JOSEPH'S DRAWING BULK OF STUDENTS AWAY FROM CONFRONTATION WITH SECURITY FORCES. SEVERAL HUNDRED DEMONSTRATORS HAD BRIEF EXCHANGE OF INSULTS, STONES, TEAR GAS AND WATER WITH GENDARMERIE EVENING MAR 13 BEFORE DISPERSING. STRIKES AND DEMONSTRATIONS LIABLY CONTINUE NEXT WEEK, WITH AMERICAN UNIVERSITY BECOMING MAJOR TARGET FOLLOWING ANNOUNCEMENT OF DECISION INCREASE TUITION BY 10 PCT. THUS FAR, HOWEVER, DEMONSTRATIONS HAVE NOT GOTTEN OUT OF HAND, DESPITE LEFTIST AGITATION, THANKS TO MODERATION OF SOME STUDENT LEADERS AND DISCIPLINE OF SECURITY FORCES.

2. EFFORTS TO STIMULATE GENERAL STRIKE AND/OR DEMONSTRATIONS BY WORKERS APPEAR BE MAKING LITTLE HEADWAY. IT MOST LIKELY THAT GENERAL STRIKE SET (IN PRINCIPLE) FOR APR 2 AND WILL NOT BE HELD DUE TO RELATIVE SATISFACTION OF MOST UNION LEADERS AND RANK-AND-FILE OVER RECENT ACTIONS BY GOL, INCLUDING EARLIER PAY RAISES (SEE BEIRUT A 31) AND MAR 13 DECISION EXTEND SOCIAL SECURITY COVERAGE TO TAXI DRIVERS AND BAKERS. HOWEVER, UNION LEADERS KEEPING PRESSURE ON GOL TO SET PRICE CEILINGS FOR BASIC COMMODITIES.

3. TRADITIONAL POLITICAL LEADERS HAVE MET FREQUENTLY DURING PAST WEEK, APPARENTLY TRYING PUT TOGETHER BLOC OF DEPUTIES LARGE ENOUGH TO FORCE CHANGE IN CABINET FOLLOWING CURRENT DEBATE ON BUDGET. PARLIAMENTARY SITUATION IS UNCLEAR, BUT NUMBER OF DEPUTIES WHO HAVE DECLARED THEMSELVES IN FAVOR OF CABINET CHANGE IS GROWING. CRITICAL SPEECHES BY DEPUTIES FOLLOW TIME-HONORED PATTERN, BUT CONTRIBUTE TO ATMOSPHERE OF VAGUE ANXIETY.

4. IN ADDITION TO ABORTIVE EFFORTS HIJACK KLM AIRCRAFT AND BLOW UP CAR OF IRANIAN AMBASSADOR (SEPTELS, THERE WAS ANOTHER INCIDENT INVOLVING FEDAYEEN IN BEIRUT MAR 9 WHEN FEDAYEEN LEADER FROM A REFUGEE CAMP HAD ALTERACTION WITH LEBANESE MOTORIST WHICH ENDED WITH FORMER FIRING AT LATTER INSIDE NEARBY SUPERMARKET WITH
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AUTOMATIC RIFLE BEFORE BEING GUNNED DOWN BY FUSILLADE FROM SECURITY FORCES. RESULTANT EFFERVESCENCE IN REFUGEE CAMP WAS CALMED BY SECURITY FORCES AND FEDAYEEN "MILITARY POLICE", BUT NOT BEFORE ADDITIONAL SHOOTING CAUSED WOUNDING OF ONE POLICE OFFICER AND A LEBANESE CIVILIAN. IT CLEAR THAT MAJORITY OF FEDAYEEN LEADERSHIP WISHES AVOID TROUBLE WITH GOL AT PRESENT TIME BUT IS STILL UNABLE CONTROL COMPLETELY EXTREMIST ELEMENTS EITHER ALONG BORDER WITH ISRAEL OR ELSEWHERE IN COUNTRY. IT ALSO

CLEAR THAT GOL TAKING MORE FORCEFUL STAND AGAINST FEDAYEEN
AGITATION THAN HAD BEEN CASE FEW WEEKS AGO.

5. IN ADDITION TO FEDAYEEN PROBLEMS, WE HAVE HAD SEVERAL RELIABLE
REPORTS OF INCREASED IRAQI ACTIVITY IN LEBANON, WORKING WITH PFLP
AND OTHER EXTREMIST FEDAYEEN, WITH PRO-IRAQI WING OF LEBANESE
BAATH AND WITH LEFTIST WING OF LEBANESE "SYRIAN POPULAR PARTY"
(PPS) TO MILITATE AGAINST PROGRESS TOWARD PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT IN
MIDDLE EAST, LIFTING OF OIL EMBARGO, DOWNGARDING OF NASSER, ETC.
COMMUNIST PARTY PROPAGANDA ALONG SIMILAR LINE(BEIRUT 3003) HAS
HELPED STIR THINGS UP. GOL SECURITY FORCES WATCHING THIS AS CLOSELY
AS POSSIBLE. FOR THE PRESENT, IT DOES NOT APPEAR BE SERIOUS THREAT
TO LEBANESE STABILITY, ALTHOUGH IT DOES POSE THREAT OF INCREASED
TERRORISM/SABATAGE INSPIRED BY IRAQ AS WELL AS GENERATE EXTREMIST
PROPAGANDA.
GODLEY

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Subject: LEBANESE INTERNAL SITUATION SUMMARY: PAST WEEK HAS BEEN MARKED BY STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS
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Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005